

The Tragedy of Mr. Leiter and His Wine Cellar



1—"Um-m-m! Excellent. You May Send Me a Thousand Cases of This Whiskey."

Mystery of How They Looted the Washington Millionaire's Forty-Foot Wine Cellar of Reinforced Concrete with Burglar Alarm and 3-Inch Armor-Steel Door, and Carted Away \$300,000 Worth of Liquid Treasures



2—It Was a Very Pleasant Spectacle for Mr. Leiter as Truckload Arrived at His Town Residence in Dupont Circle, Washington, Where the Wines and Liquors Were Delivered

3—But There Was Not Room in His City Residence to Properly Store It All, so Mr. Leiter Constructed a Generously Big Wine Cellar in His Country Home on the Banks of the Potomac, Where the Liquid Treasures Would Be Safe Forever, Guarded by Reinforced Concrete Walls and a Three-Inch Manganese Steel Burglar-Proof Door

one-tenth of present bootlegging prices.

All of the stuff was sent up to the house on Dupont Circle, and stored there in the spacious cellars. Up to a few months ago it remained there. But robberies of liquor became more frequent and more daring, and Mrs. Leiter suggested to her husband a fear lest the family home might be burglarized to get at the hooch. The danger seemed undeniable, and Mr. Leiter thought it particularly likely that robbers would invade the premises at some time when the family was out of town.

Accordingly, he made up his mind to remove the entire stock to his country place in Virginia, a few miles from Washington, near the Potomac and a short distance from the Leesburg pike. Here he had a more spacious cellar where the precious liquors could be stored, catalogued and made as easily accessible as books on library shelves.

Before taking this step, he ordered and personally superintended the construction, in the basement of the Virginia house, of a strongroom which (for liquor storage) was probably the most remarkable in the United States.

It was forty feet long and forty feet wide, the ceiling nine feet high. Built of reinforced concrete, its walls, two feet thick, were lined on three sides with bins and racks for liquor and wine bottles. It had no windows, and the only entrance was through a door of tough manganese steel, such as is used for battleships—a door like that of a safe deposit vault, which communicated with the interior of the house.

The room was lined with white tiles, lighted by electricity (turned on by a switch close by the door, so as to be convenient on entering), and made further proof against burglars by an alarm connected with wires which ran all around the interior. If a breach were made in the walls, the alarm must inevitably be set off.

In this huge strongroom Mr. Leiter's stock of wet goods was put away and catalogued in accordance with plans carefully made in advance. It was necessary to store the stuff in scientific fashion, in order that any of it that might be wanted should at all times be readily accessible.

The whiskey barrels were stood together, two high, toward the end of the room where there were no wall-bins or bottle-racks. The cases of spirituous liquors were piled eight high, separately according to kind. The bottles of liqueurs were stowed in the bins (resembling magnified pigeonholes), and the bottles of wine were placed in the racks along the walls, each one tilted with its neck downward—this point, as every connoisseur knows, being of absolute importance for preserving the quality of the contents.

The size of the strongroom could not be determined until a careful reckoning had been made of the space required to contain the stock of hooch and fluid etceteras, with due allowance provided for passageways among the barrels and stacked cases.

Accommodation was needed for seventy-five barrels of whiskey, 1,000 cases of whiskey, 200 cases of Old Tom gin, forty cases of Jamaica rum, 400 cases of three-star Hennessy brandy, 200 cases of extra-dry champagne, 300 cases of other wines, 120 cases of liqueurs and fifty cases of vermouth.



4—With No Little Satisfaction at His Forethought, Mr. Leiter Watched the Long Line of Trucks Transfer the Endless Barrels and Kegs and Jugs and Demijohns and Cases and Crates of Liquor from His Town House to the New Burglar-Proof Wine Cellar in His Country Home

Advance study of the booze-supply problem had convinced Mr. Leiter that, while it would be advantageous to have a reserve stock of whiskey in barrels, it was best to keep the bulk of his alcoholic fluids in glass—i. e. in bottles—for the sake of accessibility.

The store of rum was needed for punch. The gin and vermouth were required for the justly-popular Martini cocktails. The liqueurs included curacao, absinthe, chartreuse, creme de menthe, and benedictine. In figuring out the space required, it was reckoned that the seventy-five whiskey barrels, piled two high, would occupy about 115 square feet of floor. The 1,640 cases of real booze—whiskey, gin, brandy and rum—would take up 615 square feet, if stacked in tiers of eight. Allowing for total booze 730 square feet, another 730 square feet would suffice to accommodate the rest of the drinkables, while providing passageways through which to get about.

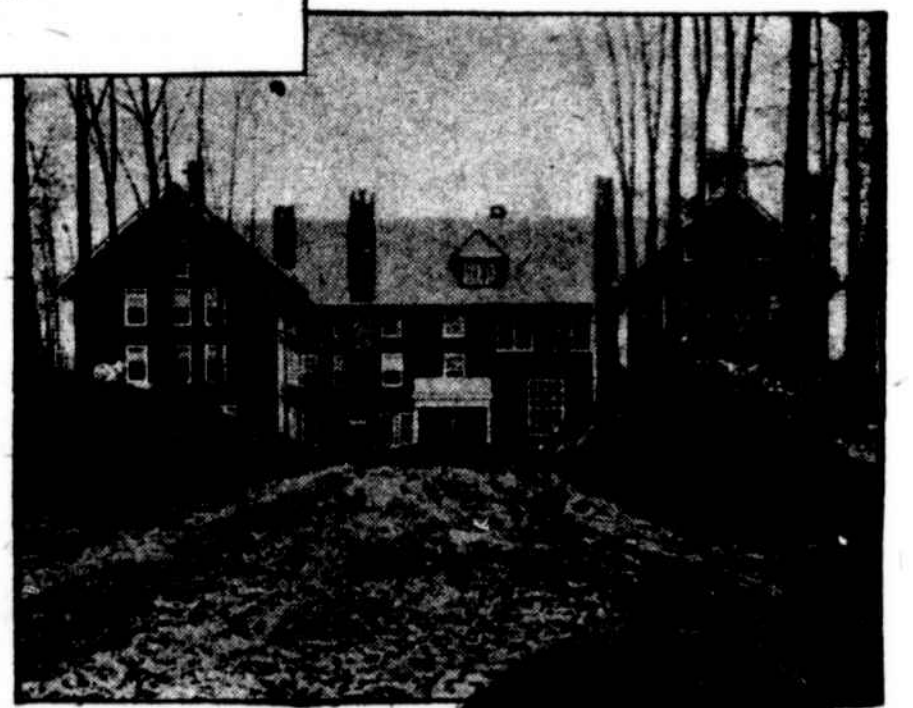
To grant a margin of safety, making sure of convenience, it was decided to build the room forty by forty feet, allowing 1,600 square feet of floor space—the bins and racks along three of the sides necessarily taking up a considerable total area. A barrel of whiskey is equivalent to thirteen cases of a dozen full quarts each. Bartenders, when such persons existed, were accustomed to reckon seventeen drinks to a quart. Some of their patrons took snorters, while others were satisfied with snifters, but that was an average. It may be said, then, that a barrel of this kind of hard liquor represents approximately 2,652 drinks. The seventy-five barrels stored by Mr. Leiter contained 198,900 drinks of whiskey.

Of additional whiskey, in bottles, he had 1,000 cases—i. e., 12,000 full quarts, representing 204,000 drinks. He was thus the happy possessor of a total of 402,900 drinks of whiskey.

His stock of three-star Hennessy brandy was 400 cases of twelve quarts each. Brandy is powerful stuff; hence drinks of it are customarily smaller. Commonly it is served in tiny glasses called "ponies." Reckon thirty drinks to a quart, and you will see that Mr. Leiter's 4,800 quarts represented 144,000 fair swigs of brandy.

Of gin this fortunate millionaire had 200 cases, or 2,400 quarts. It was needed for cocktails, as already explained. Supposing that one quart would provide for twenty-five of those delectable appetizers,

Mr. Leiter's Country Home, Just Outside of Washington, on the Banks of the Potomac, Where the Strongly Built Wine Cellar Was Broken Into and Looted



5—And Then, in Spite of All His Trouble, Expense, and Resourcefulness, Somebody Lured Away the Watchman, Cut a Hole in His "Burglar-Proof" Steel Door and Cleaned Out Every Bottle and Barrel and Jug of All That Liquor Except a Few Cases of Beer.

with proper admixture of vermouth and other ingredients, it appears that Mr. Leiter had on hand the fluid materials requisite for compounding 60,000 cocktails.

He had 480 quarts of rum, the best Jamaica. How much rum punch would that make? It depends on the maker. One must guess that out as best he can.

The stock of liqueurs cached in the Virginia house was 1,400 bottles. Mostly they were not full quarts. On the other hand, they are such strong stuff that it is customary to serve them in little glasses. Say thirty drinks to the bottle, and you have a total of 42,000 drinks of chartreuse, creme de menthe, etc.

As already stated, Mr. Leiter did not invest very heavily in wines, relatively speaking. His strongroom, at the time of the robbery, contained only about 200 cases of champagne and 300 cases of other wines (including port, hock, sherry and madeira), or 6,000 quarts. This was not much, when it is considered that a dozen or more bottles may be drunk at a single dinner party. In fact Mr. Leiter seems to have been rather badly off for wines—only 6,000 quarts.

Summing up what has gone before, it appears that, without counting the wine and rum, Mr. Leiter had in stock a total of over 650,000 drinks.

If Mr. Leiter had himself undertaken to consume unassisted those 650,000 drinks, at a rate of ten drinks a day, they would have lasted him over one hundred and eighty years!

Mr. Leiter was convinced that his liquor vault was impregnable. But, as events have proved, it wasn't. On a dark night in October, during the absence of the family, and while the caretaker was away,

The Face of Mr. Joseph B. Leiter —"Who Stole My Liquor?"

robbers effected an entrance to the house, and, apparently knowing very well the topography of the establishment, bored through the three-inch steel door with an acetylene torch (which they had stolen from a factory in Washington), and looted the strongroom of its entire contents, carrying the stuff off in trucks.

As usual in such instances, there is no trace of the heartless bandits, who presumably have since been engaged in "bootlegging" Mr. Leiter's precious wet goods. It is understood that, lacking confidence in the police, he has employed his own private detectives to pursue his despoilers.

Why did not the alarm go off when the robbery was committed? Probably it did, but as the robbers had taken the precaution to have the watchman lured away there was nobody at hand to hear it.



Mrs. Joseph B. Leiter

THE saddest multi-millionaire in the United States to-day is Mr. Joseph Leiter, of Washington. He has suffered a loss which is beyond repair. He is the victim of a great tragedy.

Mr. Leiter dwells in one of Washington's proudest palaces, a white brick mansion with a noble portico on Dupont Circle. With a beautiful, wife, unlimited money to spend, and nothing to do but amuse himself, one might imagine that he would be happy.

So he was, until the other day. But since then a frightful, an irremediable misfortune has befallen him. He has been robbed of his stock of hooch!

And such a stock! Three hundred thousand dollars' worth gone at one fell crash. A gang of enterprising bandits broke into the strongroom wherein the stuff was stored, and carried off the whole of it in motor-trucks.

A misfortune? It was a catastrophe.

When the cloud of approaching prohibition appeared on the horizon, a couple of years ago, Mr. Leiter took counsel with himself. The men-o-e, so frightening to the many, gave him no alarm. All he need do was to lay in a sufficient store of wet goods to last him the rest of his life, and the dry law could go hang. And he had the money to do it.

Mr. Leiter took a long look ahead. He was then fifty years old. How much stuff would he need to see him through, supposing that he lived to be ninety?

He figured it out carefully—not only for

what would be required for his own personal consumption, but to include all reasonable future demands upon his hospitality. The Leiters do a good deal of entertaining. When prohibition should arrive, for a great drought was in prospect, whereas Noah was obliged to provide against a flood, Noah's outlook was in one respect much less serious, inasmuch as he had to prepare for a flood of only forty days, whereas the drought ahead of Mr. Leiter might last forty years, if he lived that long.

How much would be necessary—that was the question. What kinds of drinkables, and how much of each? Wines, of course, in quantity. But in a real alcoholic drought the stuff most needed was bound to be substantial—whiskey and other spirits; in other words, straight booze.

Mr. Leiter spent many a wakeful hour at night thinking the problem out. He decided to cut down his first figures for champagne and other wines, and to put most of the money into real hooch. At least half of the sum he had decided to spend must go for whiskey.

He put a list of the fluids he wanted in the hands of his liquor dealer. Buying in great quantities, he was able to get liquors and wines of the best brands for less than